

recognition, I ask unanimous consent to speak 10 additional minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONGRESSIONAL INACTION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Massachusetts because I think he has made his case convincingly that there are many things we have failed to do in this Congress which mean a lot to the American people.

Take a look at the inaction of the Republican-controlled Congress on so many issues that are really life-and-death, day-to-day issues that families across America expect us to lead on, such as the issue of commonsense gun safety; 30,000 American lives were lost to gun violence in 1999. We lose 12 children every single day in America. As many children are dying in America because of gun violence every day as were lost at Columbine High School. It is a reminder that we have a situation with gun violence that is unprecedented in the history of the world. The obvious conclusion from the Republican leadership is, there is nothing we can do or want to do to change it.

We believe, on the Democratic side, that commonsense gun safety is something we should enact, and do it very quickly. We passed a bill here on the floor of the Senate. It had a tie vote of 49-49. Vice President Al Gore cast the deciding vote. We sent it over to the House of Representatives. In 2 or 3 weeks, the gun lobby tore it to pieces. They sent it to a conference committee. For over 1 solid year, that bill has been stuck in a conference committee because the Republican leadership is unwilling to bring forward any gun safety legislation. Yet we see these statistics where literally thousands of Americans are victims of gun violence.

In my State of Illinois, in the city of Chicago, there are now gathering together summit conferences of leaders from communities because of the unprecedented killings which are taking place—particularly of our children—with drive-by shootings. Children are being killed while lying in bed or sitting on the front porch with their parents. It is becoming too commonplace. The obvious attitude of the Republican leadership is, there is nothing they are willing to do to even try to address it.

We think if you buy a gun at a gun show, you should go through the same background check as a person who buys a gun from a gun dealer. We want to know if you have a history of violent mental illness. We want to know if you have committed a violent felony in the past. We want to know if you have a history of the kind of activity that has required an injunction to protect someone against domestic violence. We think it is only fair and just that we ask people who want to exercise their

rights under the second amendment to accept the inconvenience of a few questions being asked. Yet the Republicans apparently disagree. They refuse to move any gun safety legislation.

As to the Patients' Bill of Rights, which Senator KENNEDY addresses, every day 14,000 Americans are denied their needed medicines; 10,000 are denied their needed tests and procedures. You know the stories. You know that in your hometown convenience store there is a little canister which says, can you leave your change for this little girl, who needs a certain medical treatment, which is even denied by her insurance company, for which she has no insurance. That is a reality for a lot of families who are struggling to pay for expensive medical care. It is the reality of many of these families who turn to these insurance companies. These companies say: No, it is not one of our recommended procedures; your doctor is just going to have to be told no. I have talked to those doctors who have said to mothers and fathers what their child needs, and then they turn around and find an insurance company overruling them.

We think patients in this country should come first, that quality medical care should be in the hands of professionals and not in the hands of insurance company clerks.

More than 11 million Americans have been denied an increase in the minimum wage for over 2 years. In Illinois, 350,000 people got up and went to work this morning for \$5.15 an hour. These are not lazy people. These are hard-working people who are asking this Congress to keep them in mind as we give tax breaks to wealthy people, to keep them in mind as we approve congressional salaries for those of us who serve in the House and Senate. But no, the Republican leadership has told us we have no time to consider an increase in the minimum wage.

Of course, the prescription drug benefit under Medicare—13 million seniors in America have no prescription coverage.

I met a woman in Chicago who had a double lung transplant. Her medical bills are \$2,500 a month for the drugs she needs so her body will not reject these lungs. She can't afford it. She has to turn to welfare and to Medicare. She lives in a basement with her children because, frankly, she has no income, no resources. She has had times when she didn't have the money to fill her prescription, and she has suffered irreversible lung damage every time that has happened. That is her life every single day.

That is what it means to be poor in America—or, even those with Social Security checks who do not think themselves to be poor and able to afford prescription drugs.

Yet when we propose a plan that offers guaranteed universal coverage

under Medicare for prescription drugs, the Republican leadership says: No, we think we ought to turn to these same insurance companies that have treated us so well—I use that term advisedly—under our HMO and managed-care system and ask them to give prescription drug benefits, the same insurance companies that have been cutting people off when it comes to HMO supplemental policies under Medicare.

Over 1 million Americans have been cut off, many in my State of Illinois. I don't trust the insurance companies to provide, out of the kindness of their hearts, prescription drug benefits. I think there should be guaranteed universal coverage under the Medicare system.

Another bill stopped by the Republican Congress is school modernization.

We should debate a bill that will allow us to increase the limits of immigrants coming into this country to provide those immigrants to fill highly-skilled jobs and good-paying jobs in this country that can't be filled with American workers. I think it is a reality. It is the No. 1 complaint of businesses that can't find skilled workers.

Yesterday, as I got on the plane in Springfield, IL, a fellow from a local company, Garrett Aviation, said: Let me tell you that my biggest problem in business is I can't find workers to fill the jobs.

The industries come to Congress and say: Allow us to have more people immigrate to the United States who can fill these jobs. I think it is a real problem. If we don't allow this immigration, some of those jobs and companies will go overseas.

But let's look at it in the long term. What are we doing to improve the workforce in America to make sure we have people who are skilled enough to fill these jobs and make these good incomes? Are we dedicating our money in our schools and in training to make this happen? I don't think so.

In the 1950s, we were afraid of the Russians. When they launched Sputnik with their advances in science, we passed the National Defense Education Act. We said: We are going to help kids across America pay for their college education. We believed that these kids, once trained, would make America strong so we would not have to worry about this threat from Russia.

I know about that program. I was one of the beneficiaries. I borrowed money from this Government to go to college and law school. I hope many people think that was a good investment. Some may not think so. I paid the money back. Shouldn't we do the same thing again with a national security education act that says we want to train our workers for the future needs in America to make certain they can fill the jobs with Boeing Aircraft in St. Louis or Motorola in the Chicago area? We are not doing that.

This Congress won't address that. It won't address school modernization. It won't address the question of the deduction for college education expenses. It won't address the need to improve teacher skills. That is something we don't have time for on the agenda of this Congress.

Businesses across America look to us for leadership. Families across America expect us to create opportunities. Time and again, we have seen instead efforts by the Republicans in the Senate to give tax breaks to the wealthiest people in America and to ignore the realities facing our families. I think our agenda has to be an agenda closer to the real needs of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, our colleague from Illinois and others have talked about the things we have not passed and that they would like to see passed in this session. But we have a big problem. We have a problem because the absolutely essential work that this body must do is being held up. The work on appropriations bills that fund the agencies of Government for the next year must be done before the end of the fiscal year—September 30.

Many of the things my colleague has talked about have already been passed and are in conference. But we can't get floor time to do it when we are dealing with filibusters. The Democratic plan has been to stall, delay, and block.

We will have an opportunity to vote on cloture on the Treasury-Postal bill. That means cutting off a filibuster. But that goes through the lengthy process of the 30 hours that are required for debate.

We are also ready to take up the energy and water appropriations bill. But the minority leader has raised objection to that.

Energy and water carries many important things. It carries funding for projects that are vitally important to South Dakota—to river States such as Missouri, to the Nation, the national laboratories in New Mexico, and others.

All of these vital appropriations are being held up because the minority leader is now objecting to a provision that was included in the bill this year but has been included in four previous bills Congress has sent to the President and which have been signed by the President. The state of affairs is, we are ready for a time agreement. If there are objections to particular items in a bill, we have a process called amendments. You can move to strike; you can move to amend. We are ready to do business.

Let there be no mistake. Let the American people understand. We are

watching a series of Democratic stall, moves—delay, stall, and block. Sometimes we call them a filibuster. But filibusters don't need to be people talking on the floor. It can be refusal to allow a bill to come up. It can be filibustered by amendments. Basically, it is the Democratic side that is trying to keep the Senate from doing its work.

We have lots of important votes. They may win; we may win some. The Senate has its rules. It permits debate and amendment. We are willing to do so and debate a commonsense provision that happens to be in this bill to see what the will of the Senate is.

The provision in the bill as reported out of committee that has existed in four previous appropriations bills, previously signed by the President, is designed to prevent changes to Missouri River management which would increase the risk of spring flooding and bring many dire consequences. I intend to lay out some of the problems and a number of leaders in this country who oppose it.

The provision is very simple. It is also very important. The provision is designed to stop flooding. Out West we hear the Fish and Wildlife Service is now proposing to tear down dams. Here the Fish and Wildlife Service wants to take action on flow management to pretend that dams don't exist. They have gone out of their way to try to dictate the work of the Corps of Engineers. There are all kinds of procedures—there are public hearings, there are assessments, there are impact statements, and many other things—required before an agency can take action. The Fish and Wildlife Service wants to jump over all that and say: Corps of Engineers, you do our bidding. They sent a letter on July 12 which said: You must establish a plan to increase spring flooding on the Missouri River and to cut off the possibility of effective barge transportation, environmentally sound barge transportation in the summer and the fall, affecting not only the Missouri River but the Mississippi River as well.

The Fish and Wildlife Service wants to do to the communities, to the States along the Missouri River, what the National Park Service did to the community of Los Alamos when it tried a control burn. We don't need a controlled flood that the Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed.

While we have a lot to debate with our friends in the upper basin about the way the river is managed, I never expected they would ever support an action simply designed to increase downstream flooding. As far as I know in the debates—and they have been vigorous debates in the past—that was never their intent. I don't know what the intent now is of the minority leader. We have fought vigorously and honestly with our friends in the upper river States about their desire to keep

fall water for their recreation industry. We want to work out ways to help them. We need that late year water to ensure we keep river transportation so our farmers have an economical and environmentally sound way of getting their products to the market. We also need flood control. We have never had them complain about flood control. Dams were built in the middle of the last century, principally to prevent flooding on the lower Mississippi and lower Missouri Rivers. Mr. President, 85 percent of the population in the Missouri River basin lives in the lower basin below Gavin's Point. That doesn't include the lower Mississippi River which gets that water from the Missouri.

As with the dams out West, the Fish and Wildlife Service has a theory that we should travel back in time and have rivers that "mimic the natural flow of the river." Dams were built to stop the natural flow because the natural flow was flooding many hundreds and thousands of acres. It was killing people and damaging billions of dollars of property. One third of our State's food production is in the floodplain of the Missouri River and the Mississippi River. In 1994, the Corps of Engineers proposed to change the river and have a spring rise.

On a bipartisan basis, we communicated our opposition to the President. Twenty-eight Senators representing States along the Missouri and Mississippi and Ohio Rivers signed this letter to the President. The Corps went back to the drawing board and began fresh to develop a consensus plan. Between then and early this year, a consensus among the States—with the exception of Missouri—was developed that included conservation measures but had no spring rise.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, at the table with the States for years, came to Washington, and the next thing we know they are insisting on a spring rise, the will of the States, the comments of the people, the overwhelming objection of State and local officials notwithstanding.

The Fish and Wildlife Service doesn't want public comments. They heard them. They know what the comments are. Don't flood us out. The Fish and Wildlife Service has no mandate to protect people from the dangers of flooding. I invite them out the next time we have a spring flood in Missouri to see the devastation, to comfort and console the families who have lost loved ones in floodwaters. We lost some this year in floods in Missouri. The public has gone on record strongly opposing this spring rise. In 1994, the public opposed it, from Nebraska to St. Louis to New Orleans to Memphis and beyond. To prevent the risk of downstream flooding in 1995, Congressman BEREUTER from Nebraska put a provision in the energy and water appropriations